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STORY OF PENNY POSTAGE

FRED. J. MELVILLE

BOSTON
WARREN H. COLSON

A PENNY ALL THE WAY

The Story of Penny Postage

2237.115

By FRED. J. MELVILLE

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"THE A B C OF STAMP COLLECTING"

"THE POSTAGE STAMPS OF THE UNITED STATES"

ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

BOSTON

WARREN H. COLSON

PUBLISHER OF PHILATELIC LITERATURE

POSTAGE STAMPS FOR ADVANCED COLLECTORS

1908

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GEO. VON L. MEYER

Postmaster General of the United States

Introduction

IN preparing this short story of Penny Postage at a time when popular interest in the subject is aroused by the inauguration of Penny Postage between Great Britain and the United States, the writer has given his chief attention to the more obscure phases of the development of the idea of Penny Postage. Rowland Hill and his great struggle to impress the post office and the treasury officials with the main arguments in favor of Uniform Penny Postage are matters which are dealt with in our histories. But of his namesake John Hill, who tried to introduce a similar plan nearly two centuries earlier, nothing is known. The name of William Dockwra is known only to students of postal history and to philatelists. Yet he established what was in many senses a better system of local postage in London in 1680, at the rate of one penny per letter, than was in existence in London in 1840.

After Rowland Hill came one Elihu Burritt, "the learned Blacksmith," whose memory is cherished in the United States, and who, long before his own country had adopted Uniform Penny Postage, urged Great Britain to give to the world what he termed Ocean Penny Postage. This was a measure differing from yet anticipatory of Imperial Penny Postage and Universal Penny Postage, which became questions of later years.

Imperial Penny Postage, though it had long been discussed was actually brought about by Canada. Now

we have the great step towards Universal Penny Postage in the penny rate between Great Britain and the United States, for which, no doubt, the credit is due in both countries to the progressive policies of the Postmasters General. It is something to both nations that the first step towards Universal Penny Postage has linked under one Penny Postage the two great English speaking peoples of the world.

The names of those who have led in the various stages of the development of Penny Post are mostly overshadowed by that of Rowland Hill. But they are all worthy of remembrance for

"The arts of peace are great,
And no less glorious than those of war."

A PENNY ALL THE WAY

THE earliest proposal for carrying on a limited postal service in England at a penny rate is traceable to certain private "Undertakers" in 1659. Charles I had in the thirteenth year of his reign erected by Letters Patents a new office called "the Letter Office of England." This office was granted to Thomas Witherings for life, and in a proclamation dated 11th February 1637-8, the monopoly of the carrying of letters was established and granted to the said Witherings.

According to contemporary manuscripts it appears that notwithstanding the restrictions against private enterprise divers persons continued their liberty in sending and carrying letters by post and Witherings caused certain persons named Grover, Chapman, Cotton and Mackedrall, to be imprisoned for posting with letters. Parliament voted (August 16, 1642) that the taking of letters from and the restraints and imprisonments of the said persons was against law, liberty and freedom of the subjects, and that those several persons ought to have reparations from Sir John Coke and Sir F. Windebanke, Secretaries of State, and from Mr. Witherings.

Edmond Prideaux who succeeded to the letter office in 1644 kept up the restraints against private enterprise and continued to exact the high rate of 6d. for every letter. The Undertakers (from whom we get the first

suggestion of a penny post) "conceived it would be a worke both acceptable to the state, and beneficial to the people, to contrive the abatement of those Excessive rates; and therefore maugre all oppositions and abuses of the Monopolizer and his Interest; they in Anno 1652 at first dash adventured on Postage at the rates of 3d. a Letter beyond 80 miles and 2d. a Letter within, or to 80 miles, and to make returne three times weekely; And their exact performance in that undertaking was soe gratefull to the people, and successefull, that it forced the Monopolizer for the present only and out of a designe to supplant the undertakers, to publish his readinesse to carry at the same Rates."

Prideaux's plan however did not meet with the approbation of the people, who were sensible from whom their benefit came, and the Undertakers persisted in their enterprise.

They did not have their post in operation long, however, for in June 1653 the Council of State granted a warrant to Mr. John Manley who then farmed the Letter Office "to stop all Males of Letters which shall be carryed by any persons except by such as are authorized from him."

Manley, lost no time in putting the warrant into execution and "in the company of Mr. Prideaux, did in a ryotous manner, with swords and other weapons, by force break into the house, where the Goods and Letters of the Undertakers were, and thrust their servants out of doores; and after threatning speeches and many more outrages, restraygned these undertakers from receiving Letters."

The Undertakers are stated to have lost 3403 £: 0*s*: 4*d*: in establishing the post and seven years later in 1659 having obtained no redress, one of the Undertakers adventured a further Ease of the people in this manner, viz:

The Practical Method

OF THE

PENNY-POST:

Being a Sheet very necessary for all Persons to have by them,

For their Information in the Regular Use of a Design so well Approved of, for quickening Correspondence, Promoting Trade and Publick Good.

With an Explanation of the following Stamps, for the Marking of all Letters.

HEreas *William Dockwra* of *London* Merchant, and the rest of the Undertakers (who are all Natives and free Citizens of *London*) out of a sence of the great benefit which would accrue to the numerous Inhabitants of this Great City, and adjacent parts, (with hopes of some Reasonable Encouragement hereunto to Themselves) have lately Stamp'd a *Penny Interest* to convey Letters and Parcels, not exceeding One Pound Weight, and Ten Pounds in Value, to and from all Parts within the Contiguous Buildings of the Weekly Bills Mortality for a Penny a Letter or Parcel; whereby Correspondency, the Life of Trade and Business, is and will be much facilitated; and having for above a Year past, with great pains, and no small Thousands of Pounds Charge, reduced the same into Practice, which does manifestly appear to be for the Publick Good; yet as all new Designs at first usually meet with Opposition and great Discouragements, rarely (if at all) proving beneficial to the First Adventurers, so hath this also incurr'd the same Fate hitherto, especially from the Ignorant and Envious, but the Undertakers do hope that all People will be Convinced, by time and experience, which removes Prejudice and Errors, and renders all New Undertakings Compleat, for the Attainment of which good Ends, they have with great Industry, much expence of time, and at a Chargeable Rate, made such Alterations in their former Methods, as (they hope) will more fully Answer Satisfaction. And whereas there has been much Noise about the pretended Delays and Miscarriage of Letters done by the *Penny-Post*, which has risen through the great Malice and Neglect of other People, the Undertakers can sufficiently Evidence, by many *Authentick* Certificates which they have ready to produce, for the Justification of their due Performance to the General, yet less there been so many Cheats and Unjust Reflections cast on to Undermine the Undertakers, that they hold it highly Necessary to undeceive the World, by shewing some of the grounds from whence they spring, viz. Some Men suppose, and confidently Affirm their Letters are Miscarried, (or at least Delayed,) because they have not always an immediate Answer, when perhaps

"To carry in all the usual Roads
"In England after the rate of a Penny)
"Into Wales and Scotland at two pence) Letter
"Into Ireland at fourpence)
"And small parcells of Commodities at the rate of
"In England at threepence)
"Into Wales and Scotland for fourpence) an ounce
"Into Ireland at sixpence")

The original Undertakers in 1652 appear to have been Clement Oxenbridge, Richard Blackwell, Francis Thomson and William Malyn, the first named becoming later deputy to Prideaux. It appears from a report of the Postmasters-General to the King, March 1, 1696-7, on a petition of Joanna Oxenbridge, that "Mr. Clement Oxenbridge and his partners were instrumental in reducing the postage of letters from 6d. to 3d. and in establishing new posts where none had been before."

In their efforts to introduce a cheap postal service in 1652 the Undertakers were assisted, possibly led, by one John Hill, an attorney of York, who, at the latter end of the year, placed horses on the road between London and York, whereby travellers "might be furnished with Horses and Furniture at the rate of two pence for a Mile."

"At the instance of the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and others of the City of York, Town of Hull, Newcastle, Durham and other Corporations, and having the approbation of the Officers of the Armies then in Scotland and the Northern parts of this Nation," John Hill "undertook the carrying of letters and small commodities, at the half rates, and less, than the same had at any time been carryed at, which tended much to the advantage and ease of the people; and taking to himself *Clem. Oxenbridge, Esq.;* and others, partners, (they being much importuned by many Citizens of London, and most of the Corporations within this Nation, to

communicate the like benefit into all the usual Roads in *England* and *Scotland*) settles the same not onely in the usual Roads, but also in several places where no Posts formerly went."

They "continued such carriage of Letters for one whole year, though to their great loss and damage. But soon after they had settled the Thursday Post.....the Parliament being then first interrupted in the year 1653 the Council of *Oliver,* late Lord Protector, let the carriage of Letters as well foreign as Inland to a man (John Manley) who had neither spent money, nor taken pains in reducing the same, which caused a forcible restraint by Souldiers to be put upon the said Undertakers, and they compelled to desist from their lawful employment for the ease and benefit of the Nations."

There seems little room for doubt that John Hill was the first Undertaker of a Penny Postal rate referred to, for he states that "at the fresh importunity of many thousand Citizens of London .....the said Undertaker (himself) made provision by settling most of the Northern Road with Horses and Agents for the carrying of letters and small commodities....." and that "its intended (if not restrained by Authority) to proceed in setling the rest of the Roads, in order to the carrying of Letters and Commodities at the Rates published, being a penny for England, two pence for Scotland, and four pence for Ireland, and 3*d. per* ounce for small Commodityes."

In John Hill we have a postal reformer alike in surname and in purpose with Rowland Hill yet nearly two centuries before his famous namesake. John Hill published a pamphlet (Rowland was a keen pamphleteer) in 1659 entitled:

A PENNY

POST

or a

VINDICATION

of the

LIBERTY AND BIRTHRIGHT

of every

ENGLISHMAN

in

Carrying Merchants and other men's *Letters,* against any restraint of Farmers of such Employments

BY JOHN HILL

LONDON

Printed in the Yeare 1659.

His arguments are not merely worthy of Rowland Hill; some of them bear a strong resemblance to those of the great reformer.

> It hinders a man to be as civil as otherwise he would, or might be, in having, or returning an accompt to, or from his friend, many a man in these times being forced to set a greater value of 6*d.* or 3*d.* than of three times as much in former times, when money was more plentiful, and certainly any man but a Farmer* will confess it to be a strange imposition, that a man cannot have an accompt of the condition of his Wife or Family, without paying thrice as much as he need; and it seems as unreasonable for a man to be forc'd to pay 3*d.* for what may be done for a penny, (in relation to Letters) as for a man to be compelled to pay thrice as

*At this period the revenues of the Letter Office were farmed out.

much for meat or any other commodity, as the price currant.

He goes on to show that the imposition on letters brought no considerable increase to the Revenue, all beyond about £8,000 (the "rent" paid by the Farmer of the Post Office) going into the pockets of the Farmer, and "what is such a sum (as £8,000) added to above two Millions, which is conceived to be the least of the publike in-come one way or other?"

He protests that the people had rather pay thrice as much other ways, being not so embittered by the payment in gross, as this way, which tends chiefly to the pinching or discouragement of the active Tradesman.

> Though a man will willingly pay three-pence to have an accompt of his family, or business rather than want such an accompt; yet certainly no man will, or ever did willingly pay three-pence, for which he need pay but a penny. And if for reasons of State Posts must be erected, certainly he is not the fittest man that will give the most money for it, but rather he that will undertake the service at the cheapest rate, which must be the best advantage to the Common-wealth.

No doubt between the years of 1660 and 1680 several proposals were put forward for the establishment of a limited penny postage rate of one penny, and Sir John Bennet, the deputy and brother of the Postmaster General, the Earl of Arlington, had a scheme for a Penny Post submitted to him by one Mr. Foxley which he rejected as impracticable.

A Penny Post which took practical form and operated for one hundred years in London was originated by private enterprise in 1680, when Robert Murray and William Dockwra set up the London Penny Post. Murray had formerly been clerk to the general commissioners for the revenue of Ireland,

SIR ROWLAND HILL

and afterwards to the commissioners and grand Excise of England. He was evidently of an ingenious turn of mind, and "invented and introduced" the Club of Commerce, and later he set up the Bank of Credit at Devonshire House in Bishopsgate Street-without. At the time of the establishment of the Penny Post he appears to have been a milliner (or an upholsterer) of the company of Clothworkers. He was born on December 12, 1633.

Dockwra was born about 1616-1622. In 1663-4 he was constituted by Letters Patent by Treasurer Southampton to the office or place of under searcher or subsearcher in the port of London.

In *Mercurius Civicus* No. 1. Monday 22 March 1679-80 is the earliest notice of the new post.

> We are informed some ingenious persons and good Citizens, for the benefit of the City and Suburbs in point of charge and quick conveyance of Notes and Letters, have projected a method for doing the same throughout for 1d. a Letter one with another, further or nearer, which may be termed a Footpost, whereof our next may give you more particular account.

To Dockwra appears to be due the credit of the organization, while the idea probably was Murray's. The latter was an ingenious but an unreliable individual and the two broke their partnership apparently almost at the outset.

An extensive collection of documents, etc., relating to the history of this penny post is in course of publication, but for the purpose of the present sketch of penny postage a short extract from the best contemporary account, that of Thomas De Laune in his *Present State of London,* 1681 will suffice. This writer says:

> The Principal Office to which all Accompts, etc., are daily transmitted, is in *Lyme Street,*

at the Dwelling-house of the said Mr. *Dockwra*, formerly the Mansion-house of Sir *Robert Abdy* Knt.

There are seven *Sorting-houses*, proper to the seven *Precincts*, into which the Undertakers have divided *London*, *Westminster*, and the Suburbs, situated at equal distances, for the better maintenance of mutual Correspondence.

There are about 400 or 500 Receiving-houses to take in Letters, where the Messengers call every hour, and convey them as directed; as also Post-Letters, the writing of which are much increased by this Accommodation, being carefully convey'd by them to the General Post-Office in *Lombard Street*.

There are a great Number of Clerks and poor Citizens daily employed, as Messengers, to Collect, Sort, Enter, Stamp and Deliver all Letters, every Person entertained giving Fifty pounds security, by Bond, for his Fidelity; and is to be subject to the Rules and Orders, from time to time, given by the Undertakers, who oblige themselves to make good anything deliver'd to their Messengers under the value of Ten pounds, if sealed up, and the Contents endorsed; And these Messengers have their Wages duly paid them every Saturday night.

By these are convey'd Letters and Parcels, not exceeding One Pound Weight, nor Ten Pound in value, to and from all Parts, at Seasonable times, *viz.* of the Cities of *London* and *Westminster*, *Southwark*, *Redriff*, *Wapping*, *Ratcliff*, *Lymehouse*, *Stepney*, *Poplar*, and *Blackwall*, and all other places within the weekly Bills of Mortality, as also to the four towns of *Hackney*, *Islington*, *South Newington-Butts*, and *Lambeth*, but to no other Towns, and the Letters to be left only at the Receiving-Houses of those four Towns for the said four *Towns*, but if brought home to their houses, a Penny more in those Towns; nor any letter to be deliver'd to them in the Street, but at the Receiving-houses.

They now do use Stamps to mark the hour of the Day on all letters when sent out from

their office to be deliver'd, by which all persons are to expect their letters within one hour, (little more or less, from the time marked thereon, excepting such Letters as are to be convey'd to the Out-Towns, and Remotest parts, which will be longer) by which the cause of delay of Letters, may be easily discern'd, *viz.* whether it be really in the Office, or their own Servants, (or others) with whom Letters are left.

The Marks they make use of for this purpose are these:

of which the First signifies Eight in the Morning, the Last, Four in the Afternoon, and the Middlemost, is the Letter of the Chief Office in *Lyme-street,* each Office having its proper Letter, and an Acknowledgement that the *Penny-Post* is paid, to prevent the giving of anything at the Delivery.

All Persons are desired not to leave any Town-Letter after six of the Clock in the Winter, and Seven in the Summer on Saturday Nights, because the many poor men employ'd, may have a little time to provide for their families against the Lords-day, having no leisure all the week besides.

Upon three days at *Christmas,* two days in *Easter* and Whitsontide, and upon the 30 of *January,* the Penny Post does not go.

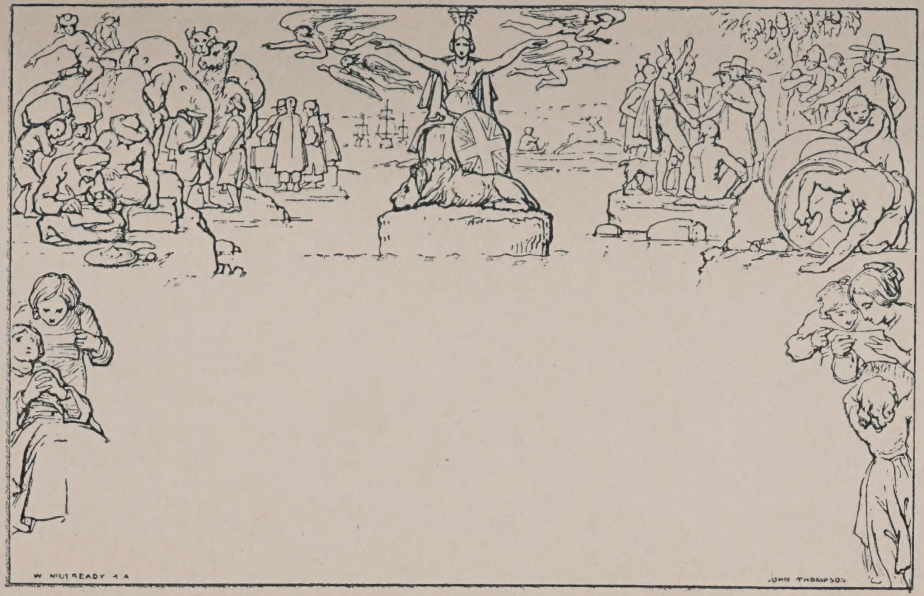
To the most remote places Letters go four or five times of the day, to other places six or eight times of the day. To Inns of Court and places of business in Town, especially in Term or Parliament-time, ten or twelve times of the day.

> On all Post-Nights due Care is taken to call for, and convey to the General Post-house in *Lombard Street* all Post-Letters, whether Foreign or Inland, left in any of the Penny-Post Receiving-houses, at or before Nine of the Clock at Night. And I could wish, for encouragement of the Undertakers, that all Persons would so far contribute to the continuance of this useful design, as to send their Post-letters by this Conveyance to the Post-Office in *Lombard Street,* which they do not Convey by themselves, or Servants.

Mr. Dockwra himself published a pamphlet containing a similar account of his penny post, this forming the subject of the illustration on page 7.

The establishment of 400-500 Receiving Houses in London was an important benefit to the people of London at a time when the General Post had only a dozen or so at the most of places where letters might be deposited. In 1677 there were eight "receivers" for the General Post and these were all within a comparatively small radius from the head office. As Mr. Herbert Joyce points out in his *History of the Post Office* "up to the 1st of April 1680, incredible as it may appear, the General Post Office in Lombard Street was the only receptacle for letters in the whole of London. There and nowhere else could letters be posted. Little wonder if, before 1680, persons whom the cost of postage might not deter from writing were yet deterred by their distance from the Post Office."

The new Penny Post appears to have been appreciated from the start, although it was vigorously opposed by the Porters who foresaw a diminution of their opportunities for earning money on the porterage of letters to the General Post Office. It was opposed also by others as a Papish design, and the notorious Titus Oates, is said to have promoted this view.


W. MULREADY R.A.
JOHN THOMPSON

Dockwra's Post started in 1680 had a little over two years of life as a private enterprise and the Undertaker is said to have expended the whole of his private fortune and that of his family in putting the organization on a business basis. As soon as it began to show promise of becoming remunerative the Duke of York afterwards James II (on whom the profits of the Post Office had been settled by Charles II), and the Earl of Arlington, who was Postmaster General, proceeded against Dockwra for infringement of the postal monopoly. A verdict was given against Dockwra in the Kings Bench Bar on 23 of Nov. 1682 and the Penny Post was taken over and set up "under authority" on 11 Dec. 1682.

For nearly 120 years the London Penny Post was carried on under the direction of the Postmasters-General following, in the main Dockwra's methods. Indeed for a time Dockwra was permitted to hold the office of comptroller of the Penny Post.

Then by an Act of 1801 the Penny Post took, as it were, a step backward, by its conversion into a Twopenny Post.

In 1708 another private individual, Charles Povey, set up what he called "a half-penny carriage" which was an imitation of Dockwra's plan but limited to a smaller area, comprising the cities of London, Westminster and the borough of Southwark but not including the suburbs. This was a flagrant infringement and Povey was fined £100 in 1710. In connection with this half-penny post the bell-ringer was introduced for the collecting of letters in the streets—a practice which in its later use has been depicted by Morland in his "Letter-woman."

By an Act of 5 George III cap xxv local penny posts were legalized in 1765. These local penny posts could be set up in any City or Town and the suburbs

thereof not only in Great Britain and Ireland but in the British Dominions in America where such Post shall, by the Post Master General, be adjudged necessary and convenient.

No posts of this character were set up for a considerable time after the passing of the Act but a penny post was set up in Edinburgh by the private enterprise of one Peter Williamson, who, keeping a coffee shop in the hall of Parliament House was in the habit of forwarding letters to different parts of the city for gentlemen attending the courts. He saw the prospect of developing this service and so established his Penny Post (1768) which had hourly deliveries and collections. His messengers or "caddies" wore a uniform and rang a bell to announce their coming so that letters would be brought out to them. Williamson's Penny Post was so successful that others tried to develop business on the same lines but the General Post Office stepped in and took over the Penny Post giving Williamson a pension of £25 a year. (Dublin had a Penny Post in 1773.)

In 1793 Penny Posts under the authority of the Act of 1765 were established in Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and Liverpool and then numbers of other towns followed suit, the late Mr. J. G. Hendy giving the number of such Penny Posts in Great Britain and Ireland shortly prior to Uniform Penny Postage as exceeding 2,000.

The proposal to introduce a Uniform Penny Postage, with which the name of Rowland Hill is associated, was the subject of an agitation extending over several years (1837-1839) and the literature on the subject in the form of propagandist pamphlets and Parliamentary papers is very extensive. Hill was indefatigable in supplying data and arguments to the authorities and he was assisted by a large coterie of notable

public men, and a Mercantile Committee on Postage which had been formed to further the agitation.

The Penny Postage Act or as it was entitled "An Act for the further regulation of the duties on Postage until the 5th October, 1840, 1 and 2 VICTORIA Cap 52," was passed 17th August, 1839, and on August 10th 1840 the provisions of the earlier Act, which had been made of temporary validity only, were made perpetual.

Uniform Penny Postage depended very largely for its success upon the introduction of the prepayment of postage instead of the old system whereby the payment generally had to be collected from the addressee. Hill and others advocated stamped envelopes or wrappers and adhesive labels as the simpiest means of collecting the postage in advance.

An envelope was prepared from a drawing by William Mulready, R. A. See Page 15. The design however did not appeal to the utilitarian mind, and the envelopes and wrappers were withdrawn after a very short period of use. The adhesive labels, or postage stamps, however, leapt into popularity and the system of prepayment of postage by means of adhesive stamps was perhaps the chief factor in securing the success of the Uniform Penny Postage scheme.

The growth of correspondence under the new system is illustrated by the following figures showing only the number of paid letters delivered in the United Kingdom.

1839	75,907,572
1840	168,768,344
1850	347,069,071
1860	564,002,000

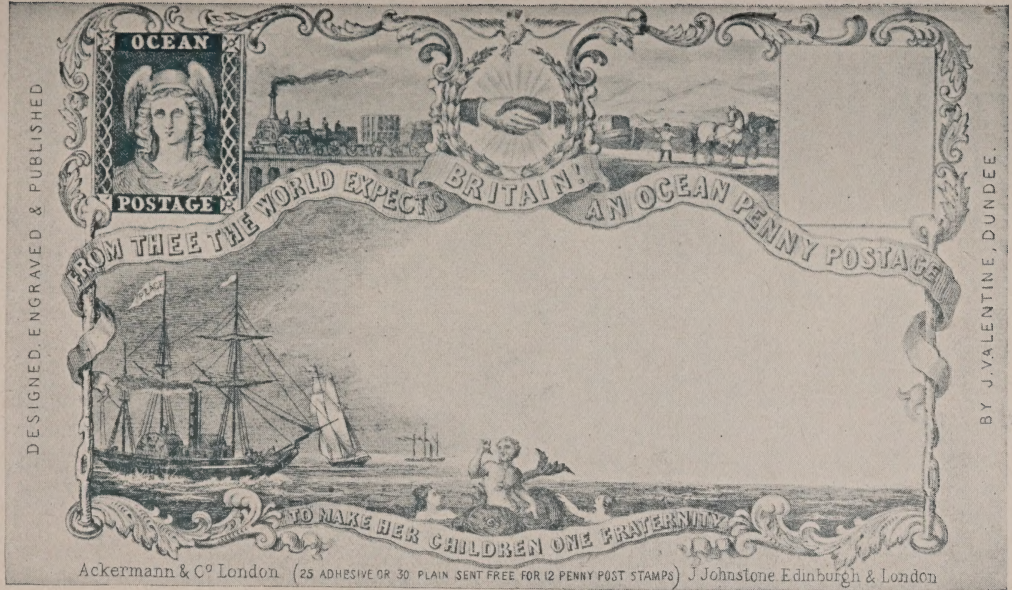
1870	862,722,000
1880	1,176,423,600
1890	1,705,800,000
1900	2,323,600,000
1908	3,140,225,000

The total number of postal packets (including letters, postcards, halfpenny packets, newspapers and parcels) delivered in the United Kingdom in the year ending 31st March, 1908 was 8,612,437,000.

Ocean Penny Postage is the next form of postal reform agitation we have to deal with, and this proposition arose very shortly after the huge success was demonstrated of a uniform inland postage rate of one penny.

The earliest pamphlet on this subject is that of Elihu Burritt, "the learned Blacksmith," whose work in various directions of reform has lately received the attention of a Burritt Memorial Committee in Philadelphia. Burritt was born at New Britain, Connecticut, 1810, and in 1842 we find him editing the *Christian Advocate* working in the interests of international peace, anti-slavery and various social reforms. He started the "League of Universal Brotherhood" one of the clauses in the pledge of membership provided for the support of any movement "for the abolition of all restrictions upon international correspondence and friendly intercourse." He promoted the first international peace congress held in 1848 at Brussels.

Included amongst our illustrations is a complete reduced facsimile of one of Burritt's smaller pamphlets issued in 1851. His first pamphlet, however, had been issued several years earlier. His proposal was not for either Imperial Penny Postage or for Universal Penny Postage, which were both proposals of a later date. He advocated an ocean rate of one penny for


OCEAN
POSTAGE
FROM THEE THE WORLD EXPECTS BRITAIN AN OCEAN PENNY POSTAGE
TO MAKE HER CHILDREN ONE FRATERNITY
DESIGNED. ENGRAVED & PUBLISHED
BY J. VALENTINE, DUNDEE.
Ackermann & Co London (25 ADHESIVE OR 30 PLAIN SENT FREE FOR 12 PENNY POST STAMPS) J Johnstone Edinburgh & London

transporting a letter from any sea port in the United Kingdom to any port beyond the seas at which the British mail packets might touch, and *vice versa.*

> "It would meet the terms of our proposition if every letter under half an ounce, from any town in Great Britain to any town in the Colonies, should pay *three pence;* one penny for the home inland rate, another penny for the ocean and the third for the colonial inland rate, and *vice versa.* The Government now charges one shilling for these rates."

Burritt's proposal therefore was for a penny rate on the ocean portion of the journey, and a penny at each end of the land journey. Thus a letter from England to the United States would be charged threepence in all, one penny for British inland postage, one penny for ocean postage and one penny (2 cents) for the United States postage. Probably Pliny Miles who in his work on *The Social, Political and Commercial Advantages of Direct Steam Communication and Rapid Postal Intercourse Between Europe and America, via Galway, Ireland,* (1859) advocates a threepenny rate to the United States was basing his suggestion upon those of Burritt. The minimum rate for a single letter to the United States from England in Burritt's time was 8d. when sent by a sailing vessel, and 1s. if sent by a steam packet.

Burritt possibly, and not unreasonably, expected the early acceptance of a uniform penny inland rate in the United States. At this time, however, and for some time after, the rates for inland postage were subject to certain distance limits. A Cheap Postage Association had been formed in Boston, and an active campaign for penny postage inaugurated by the publication of a pamphlet entitled *Cheap Postage—Remarks and Statistics on the subject of cheap postage and postal reform in Great Britain and the United States.* By Joshua Leavitt, 1848.

AN OCEAN PENNY POSTAGE.

WILL IT PAY?

BY ELIHU BURRITT

By the term "*Ocean Penny Postage,*" we mean simply this:—That the single service of transporting a letter, weighing under half-an-ounce, from any port of the United Kingdom to any port beyond the sea, at which the British mail-packets may touch, shall be performed by the British Government for *one penny*; or one penny for its mere conveyance from Folkestone to Boulogne, Liverpool to Boston, &c., and *vice versa*. Thus the entire charge upon a letter transmitted from any town in the United Kingdom to any port beyond the sea, would be twopence;—one penny for the inland rate, and the other for the ocean rate. In this brief statement of the proposition, we shall bring forward only those facts and statistics which may serve to demonstrate its feasibility; or, in other words, to show that such a measure would *pay*. And we will confine our argument to the two directions in which most of the letters to and from Great Britain are conveyed; or between it and the Continent of Europe on one side, and North America on the other. There are two great channels of correspondence between Great Britain and the Continent. The first is that between Dover and Ostend. Into this flows nearly all the correspondence of the German States, as well as that of Belgium. Now, then, can the British Government merely convey these letters between Dover and Ostend for a penny a-piece, without detriment to its revenue? How many more must it carry in its bags at that rate, than it does at the existing charge, in order to realise the present amount of revenue? And, at the outset of this argument, we must take it for granted, that the Government will be satisfied, if the *present* amount of revenue can be guaranteed under the proposed reduction. According to a recent convention with the Belgian Government, the whole charge of a letter, under a quarter of an ounce, from any town in Great Britain to any town in Belgium, is fixed at 6d. Of this the British Post-office receives 4d., and the Belgian 2d. The British Inland charge is 1d.; thus leaving 3d. for the simple conveyance of a letter across the Channel. We ask the British Post-office to perform this single service for 1d.; which, with the 1d. for the inland rate, would give the Department 2d. for the transmission of a letter from London to Ostend, instead of 4d., which it now receives for both these services. Then the number of letters must be *doubled*, in order to make an Ocean Penny Postage *pay* in this direction. Upon what sources may we depend for this increase? We shall have the effect of *two* reductions upon the correspondence of 40,000,000 Germans and Belgians with Great Britain and North America. In the first place, an arrangement has just been concluded for establishing a uniform 3d. postage through all the German States. Thus, letters from the western frontiers of Russia and Turkey will be conveyed to the eastern frontier of Belgium for 3d., which is a

great reduction on the different rates which have hitherto existed in those States. For instance, the postage on a letter from Berlin to Frankfort has been 1s., and from Hamburgh to the same town 9d. This reduction in itself, on the German inland charge, must greatly increase the number of letters which cross the Channel between Ostend and Dover. Now, then, superadd to this the reduction of the Channel rate to 1d.; which would take effect upon all the myriad tributaries of this Continental correspondence. Its influence would also reach Sweden and Russia, from which a great number of letters is now forwarded to England *via* Ostend, on account of the accelerated expedition by this route. Nearly all the railways in Germany, either in operation or in process of construction, debouch, as it were, into this channel, and letters from Pesth and Dantzic determinate in this direction. Now we would appeal to any candid mind to justify the conclusion, that these two sources of increase would *double* the present number of letters conveyed between Ostend and Dover; which is all we need to make an Ocean Penny Postage *pay* in that direction.

Nearly the same facts and arguments will apply to the other great channel of correspondence, or that between Folkestone and Boulogne. There is no postal charge in Christendom so anomalous and exorbitant as that imposed upon the correspondence between Great Britain and France. Paris is nearer to London than Edinburgh is; and as near by the Express as Manchester is by the "Parliamentary train." But the charge on a letter, weighing only quarter of an ounce, between London and Paris, is 10d.; and on one weighing half an ounce, 1s. 3d.! The different services to which this amount is apportioned, are these: the French Post Office demands 5 sous, or 2¼d., for the inland postage of a letter from Paris to Boulogne; the British Office, a penny from Folkestone to London; making 3¼d. for all the land services between the two capitals, including the most expensive charges of receiving, despatching, and delivering. Here there is 6¼d. for the mere transportation of a letter from Boulogne to Folkestone, a distance of thirty miles, and overcome by steam in two hours! But if the letter weighs half an ounce, then it is charged 1s. 3d. The French probably demand two rates for this weight, whilst the British Office allows it to one. Suppose the French receive 5d. for their inland charge on this letter; then 10d. is demanded for getting it from Boulogne to London, or *ninepence* for its mere transportation across the Channel! Is there any postal charge in the civilized world to compare with this for aggravated exorbitancy! Let us constrast it with a few of the rates adopted in different countries. From the Channel Islands to the remotest of the Shetland group, changing from steamer to railway, and from railway to steamer, for nearly 1000 miles, 1d. From the western frontiers of Russia and Turkey to the eastern boundary of Belgium, or from Trieste to Hamburgh, or from Dantzic to Aix-la-Chapelle, 3d. From the Rio Grande, or the eastern boundary of Mexico, to the north-eastern boundary of the American Union, a distance of 3,000 miles, 1½d. From Folkestone to Boulogne, a distance of thirty miles, on the twelve hours' route between the two greatest capitals of the world, 9d. What reason is there to wonder at the fertile and furtive expedients adopted by

thousands, to evade this most disproportionate charge! What wonder that so many passengers are importuned in a half whisper, not only by personal acquaintances, but by utter strangers, "just to drop this letter in any office on the other side!" The conveyance of a dozen letters, weighing in all six ounces, costs as much as the fare of a man, weighing 200lbs., in the first cabin, including the steward's fee, between Folkestone and Boulogne. One could hardly conceive of a greater temptation than is pressed upon thousands, to evade this most exorbitant and unreasonable charge, by seeking some private mode of conveyance for their letters. A reduction of the Channel rate to 1d. would break up this contraband system, and bring into the bags of the Post Office the letters now conveyed in the pockets of passengers, and in other ways. Then, the reduction would impart a powerful and immediate stimulus to all the correspondence between the two countries, and constitute another great source of increase. The whole expense of a letter, weighing under a quarter of an ounce, from any town in Great Britain to any town in France, is 10d. The French inland postage is 2½d., leaving 7½d. for the Channel and British inland services. Under a Channel Penny Postage, the whole charge on a letter from London to Boulogne, would be 2d. Then it would be necessary to *treble* the present number of letters, in order to effect this reduction without loss to the revenue. Now, is there not every reason to believe, that this amount of increase would be realised from the sources we have mentioned, and from other auxiliaries?

Let us now consider the feasibility of an Ocean Penny Postage between Great Britain and North America. The great distance to be overcome in this direction, may be opposed by many to the practicability of this proposition. But let such remember, that the British Office charges no more for conveying a letter, weighing half an ounce, from Liverpool to Boston, a distance of 3,000 miles, than from Folkestone to Boulogne, a distance of 30 miles. Every person who watches the signs of the times, must be struck with the new facilities, motives, and means of intercourse between Great Britain and North America. Six years ago, there were only four steam packets plying between the Old World and the New. Now there are *sixteen*, and eight more will be probably put on the same route in the course of a year. With so many competing lines, ready to underbid each other in the price of conveying the mails, there is reason to believe, that the British Government might save, in the cost of their transportation, half of the £145,000, which it now pays the Cunard line for that service. This saving would enable it at once to reduce the present rate 50 per cent. But, let us see if an Ocean Penny Postage in this direction would not *pay*, even without this saving. The postage on a letter, weighing half an ounce, from any town in Great Britain to any town in the United States, is 1s. Of this amount, the British Post Office receives 9½d.; consequently, we have to show, that an Ocean Penny Postage would bring into the British mails *four times* the number of letters now conveyed in them across the Atlantic, in order to make it *pay*.

The number of letters conveyed between Great Britain and America, in 1846, was 1,395,824; of which 744,108 were sent to, or received from

the United States, and 651,716 to or from the British Provinces. Let us then put the whole number thus transmitted in 1850, at 2,000,000. Now, we want 8,000,000 to produce, under an Ocean Penny Postage, the amount derived from these 2,000,000, at the shilling rate. In the first place then, nearly all will agree, that the present number of correspondents between Europe and America, would actually write two letters under the reduced rate, where they write one at the existing charge. Here we should have 4,000,000 to begin with. Then about 400,000 persons emigrate every year from Europe to America. These are new correspondents. They all leave relatives and friends behind, deeply interested in their welfare in the New World, and anxious to hear from them frequently. Let us suppose that, under an Ocean Penny Postage, they would write annually, three letters a head to these friends in Europe, and that these letters would all be answered. Then from this source alone we should have 2,400,000 the first year of the new postal system; and perhaps 4,000,000 the second, and 6,000,000 the third. An Ocean Penny Postage would doubtless bring into the mails nearly all the letters conveyed outside of them. There are at least 400,000 emigrants, passengers, officers and sailors who cross the Atlantic during the year. Let us suppose that every one of these, on an average, carries two letters in his pocket, directed to different persons in America, in order to save postage, and we have from this source 800,000. But there is a more fertile expedient than this for evading the present high rate. Thin paper, called *foreign post*, is manufactured purposely to enable persons to enclose under one envelope several communications addressed to different parties. Ten of these may be thus forwarded under a single rate. We would appeal to every person who has correspondents in America, to say, if it is too high an estimate to assume, that every envelope conveyed between Liverpool and Boston, contains two such communications. If this be admitted, then we have 2,000,000 from this source alone, which would probably be brought into the mails, as separate letters, under an Ocean Penny Postage. The last source of increase we will mention, is the saving to the Department of 120,000 *dead letters* annually which are mostly refused on account of the present charge. These letters all cross the ocean twice, and occasion as much expense as 500,000 sent and received in the ordinary way. From these sources of increase, then, we have the 8,000,000 letters which are requisite, to make an Ocean Penny Postage *pay* between Great Britain and America, as much as the existing shilling rate pays at the present time. Everything conspires to increase the urgency of this great postal reform. It would, we are persuaded, do more than any other measure, to counteract the attractions and tendencies to which the recent policy of the British Government has released the colonial populations of the empire, and to attach them to the Mother country. It would abolish the alienating distinction of distance, and bring them all home again, just as if they were the inhabitants of the different counties of Great Britain.

London, 1851.

35, *Broad Street Buildings*

In 1851 Congress approved, March 3, a considerable reduction. Inland letters, being conveyed distances not exceeding 3,000 miles were to be charged 3 cents (1 1-2d.) if prepaid; 5 cents (2 1-2d.) if not prepaid. Over 3,000 miles, inland, the rates were double *viz* 6 cents (3d.) prepaid; 12 cents (6d.) if not prepaid. The rate for the long inland distances (*i. e. over* 3,000 *miles*) was increased from 6 cents to 10 cents in 1855 and prepayment was made compulsory by the Acts of March 3, 1855 and January 2, 1857.

The actual 2 cents (penny) rate for inland letters did not come into force in the United States until October 1, 1883; the great distances to be traversed being the chief obstacle (and one which Rowland Hill had shewn in the United Kingdom did not affect the cost of transmission to any appreciable extent) which was allowed to stand in the way. In this matter France, was still longer and it was not until April 16, 1906 that the 15 centimes inland rate was reduced to 10 centimes in France.

Burritt was a Wilberforce, a Rowland Hill, a John B. Gough, and a Mr. Stead rolled into one, and most of his efforts were of great influence in all his agitations. Ocean Penny Postage he regarded as a great step towards International Peace, inasmuch as it meant the bringing of the nations together by the close personal relationship which cheap correspondence creates, and by the expansion of commercial resources from local into universal interests.

John Bright furthered Burritt's proposal and declared in reference to Ocean Penny Postage in the House of Commons in 1852 that "it was of essential importance that the utmost facilities of communication should be allowed in order that all which tended to harmony and peace should be maintained as much as possible."

SOUVENIR OF THE PENNY POSTAGE JUBILEE
Issued only to 1 Official of the British
Post Office (1890).

Burritt addressed meetings throughout Great Britain; pamphlets, and the newspapers were used in securing widespread publicity to the idea, petitions were presented to Parliament, and among other methods a number of "Ocean Penny Postage" envelopes were issued. These although in no sense official are of interest to philatelists, and the following is a list of those which are known to stamp collectors. They all bear designs suggestive of the benefits to accrue from Ocean Penny Postage.

1. Inscribed "Britain from thee the world expects an Ocean Penny Postage to make her children one fraternity." *Published* by Ackerman & Co., London, and J. Johnstone, Edinburgh and London (see illustration).
2. "Britain! Bestow this boon, and be in blessing blest. Ocean Penny Postage will link all lands with thee in trade and peace." *Published* by Myers & Co., London.
3. "The World awaits Great Britain's greatest gift, an Ocean Penny Postage, to make home everywhere and all nations neighbors." *Published* by Charles Gilpin, 5, Bishopsgate Street Without, London.
4. "The World's want and should be Britain's boon an Ocean Penny Postage." A Welcome Everywhere.

   "All ports are open where so'er she goes
   Friends hail her welcome and she has no foes."

   Published by Bradshaw & Blacklock, Manchester and London.
5. "Ocean Penny Postage" (the words inscribed in outline capitals on a long flag.) *Published* at the League of Brotherhood Office, 3, Winchester Buildings, London.
6. "Ocean-One Penny Postage would link in trade and peace the brotherhood of Man. Blessed are the peacemakers. God hath made of one blood all nations of men." Designed and engraved by J. Valentine, Dundee.

Ocean Penny Postage as an agitation widened out into "Universal Penny Postage about 1864, when Mr. William Hastings, of Huddersfield, brought the matter before the Huddersfield Chamber of Commerce. He declared that on studying the matter he found that the penny ocean postage was not cheap, that one penny from post office to post office even in different countries and across the ocean, was enough for the cost of labor and transit.

The Huddersfield Chamber of Commerce proposed at a meeting of the Associations of Chambers of Commerce in London in 1865 to send a deputation to the Postmaster General to urge the adoption of a uniform rate of one penny from any post office to any other. But the Association did not accept the proposal.

Mr. Hastings then issued in 1866 his pamphlet entitled *Universal Penny Postage* in which he showed that the manipulation in sorting, stamping and delivery of letters is no greater on foreign and seaborne letters than on inland, and that the cost of transit on a single letter is almost inappreciable, being even to Japan, under two-fifths of a penny, and from Liverpool to New York under one-hundredth.

The later discussion in England on the extension of Penny Postage across the seas has alternated between the proposals for Universal Penny Postage, and Imperial Penny Postage. Mr. Henry Fawcett, who was Postmaster General in 1880, was keenly interested in endeavouring to get the Colonies to accept a lower postal rate to and from the Mother Country; but the Colonies were afraid to lower their rates. In 1883 Mr. Arnold Foster advocated in the *Nineteenth Century* an Imperial Penny Postage, and Mr. Henniker Heaton brought up the subject in the House of Commons in 1885 by moving for the opening of negotiations to other Governments with a view to establishing Uni-

POST OFFICE JUBILEE
OF
UNIFORM PENNY POSTAGE
AT SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM, 2ND JULY, 1890.

THE NORTH MAIL MAKING FOR HIGHGATE, 1790. AT 8 MILES AN HOUR.

RATES
4d
8d
1/2
2/6

1840.

1d.

1890.

THE NORTH MAIL 1890, APPROACHING CARLISLE AT 48 MILES AN HOUR.

THE PENNY POSTAGE JUBILEE ENVELOPE

versal Penny Postage. Mr. James Hutton, M. P., an enthusiast in postal reform moved an amendment in favour of Imperial Penny Postage. In April 1890 Mr. (now Viscount) Goschen, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, found it possible to announce a 2 1-2d. rate to the colonies.

The Imperial Federation League published in 1891 a pamphlet, *Uniform Imperial Postage, An Enquiry and Proposal* by R. J. Beadon in which the writer claims that the plan would place British commerce on a more favourable footing than foreign commerce. He also proposed the extension of the inland parcel rates to the whole Empire. Mr. Stead in the *Review of Reviews* extended the idea to the whole English speaking race, including the United States.

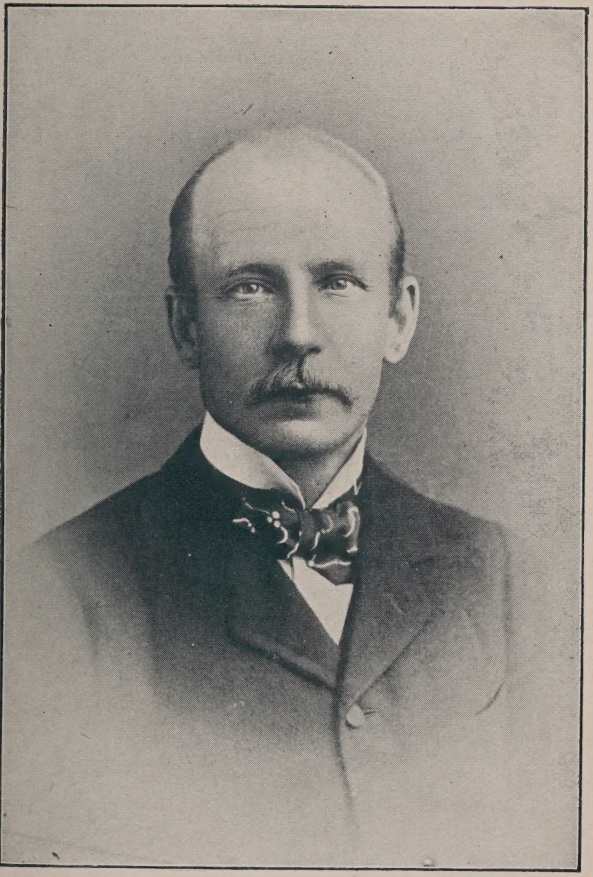
The long sustained agitation for Imperial Penny Postage was at last brought to a definite issue at the Imperial Conference on Postal Rates in 1898. The London *Standard* of 13 July, 1898 stated:

"We are authorized by the Postmaster General to state that, as the result of the Imperial Conference on Postal Rates, it has been agreed, on the proposal of the Representative of the Dominion of Canada, that letter postage of one penny per half-ounce should be established between the United Kingdom, Canada, Newfoundland, the Cape Colony, Natal and such of the Crown Colonies as may, after communication with, and approval of, Her Majesty's Government, be willing to adopt it. The date on which the reduction will come into effect will be announced later on. The question of a uniform reduced rate for the whole Empire was carefully considered; but it was not found possible to fix upon a rate acceptable to all the Governments concerned. A resolution was therefore adopted, leaving it to those parts of the Empire which were prepared for penny postage to make necessary arrangements among themselves."

The Postmaster General who had the distinction of issuing this important communication was The Duke of Norfolk, and the Representative of Canada was the Hon. (now Sir) William Mulock, LL.D., Q. C., Postmaster General of Canada, who gave the chief credit for the reform to the British Empire League. The new rate came into force on Christmas Day 1898, and it was not inappropriate that Canada, as the prime mover in the matter should celebrate the occasion by the issue of its famous map stamp, on which the British possessions are indicated in red. To get the world in colours in the small compass of a postage stamp was, perhaps, a freakish idea, and it is scarcely to be wondered at, that the red part of the design is often found by stamp collectors to have invaded the territory of the United States, while the red mark of England extends over the Channel into France.

Australia and New Zealand were still outside the penny postage scheme. In December 1900 the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal were included, and New Zealand followed in January 1901, while Australia, which had to avoid a number of anomalies connected with its inland rates, did not accept the Imperial Penny Postage until April 1905.

New Zealand's move in 1901 was far more than an



THE RIGHT HON. SYDNEY BUXTON, M. P.

acceptance of the arrangement for the Imperial Penny Postage. It was, so far as New Zealand was concerned, a plan for Universal Penny Postage, and was to mark the opening of the Twentieth Century, being inaugurated on January 1, 1901, a special stamp inscribed "Universal Penny Postage" being issued for the occasion.

By the terms of the Convention of the Universal Postal Union such an innovation could not properly be made without the consent of the other countries concerned being first obtained, and this appears to have been overlooked by New Zealand authorities. To get over the difficulty, having announced the introduction of Universal Penny Postage, letters prepaid with a penny stamp to foreign countries were, for a time, separated in the New Zealand mails and stamped with the additional postage required and sent forward to the country of destination fully prepaid.

Sir Joseph Ward, the Postmaster General of New Zealand, proposed the introduction of Universal Penny Postage at the Postal Union Congress in Rome, 1906, but did not succeed in getting the Congress to adopt it.

Penny Postage between Great Britain and Egypt and the Soudan came into force on December 15, 1905, and in announcing the innovation in Egypt the Ministry of Finance, Cairo, declared December 5, 1905 that:

"The Egyptian Government is ready to offer a similar reduction to all countries which are prepared to reciprocate."

Thus it will be noted that some of the lesser countries of the world have been in the forefront of recent postal

progress, but it must be remembered that the smaller country has less at stake in making the reduction than the Great Power with a vast postal traffic.

What the newspapers have styled the "Revolutionary Reform" of Penny Postage between Great Britain and the United States was introduced in a very quiet manner officially. The negotiations had been carried on without any publicity on either side of the Atlantic and then came the announcement in the House of Commons in answer to a question which was not on the Order Paper, put by Sir William Holland, on June 3, 1908.

> The question of Anglo-American penny postage (said Mr. Buxton) has been under the consideration of the Postmaster General of the United States and myself. I am glad to be able to announce that I have now received a telegram from Mr. Meyer saying that he is prepared to accept the proposal I made to him for the establishment of penny postage between the two countries. Certain arrangements have to be made before the change comes into force, but on and after October 1st next the rate of letter postage to the United States will be the same as that to the Colonies, that is, a penny per ounce throughout the scale instead of twopence halfpenny as at present. Perhaps I may be allowed to express the confident belief that this reduction in the postal rates between the United Kingdom and the United States will, by greatly increasing the freedom of personal and commercial intercourse, not only further the many interests the two great nations have in common, but also strengthen the mutual good feeling which happily exists between them.

Mr. Meyer, the Postmaster General of the United States in making the announcement in America stated that the reduction was limited to the postal rates between Great Britain and the United States, who have entered into special union on the subject. The privilege would not certainly for the present be extended

to other countries in the Postal Union. He declared his view that the reduced rate would ultimately be a source of increase to the postal revenue.

It is stated that the cost of reform to the British Exchequer will be £130,000 a year but it is hoped that this may be recouped by an enormous increase of correspondence between the two nations.

Both nations are to be congratulated on the enterprise of their Postmasters General. In Britain the Right Hon. Sydney Buxton, M. P. has taken a leading place among the long roll of Postmasters General and since he came into office in 1905 he has made it clear that it will not be through any want of enterprise and initiative on his part if Great Britain's postal service does not extend the penny postage still further while he is at the General Post Office.

The Hon. George von Lengerke Meyer is a Bostonian. In 1893 he was chosen speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives and was re-elected for three consecutive terms. He was a member of the Republican National Committee for eight years. President McKinley appointed him ambassador to Italy in 1900 and President Roosevelt transferred him to Russia in 1905. His diplomatic experience in Europe must have impressed upon him the advantages of a broader penny postage and he has lost no time since his recall in February 1907 to enter the cabinet of President Roosevelt, and his taking the oath of office as Postmaster General on March 4, 1907, to bring about the most important postal reform in the United States since the country adopted uniform penny postage in 1883.

It is only a matter of time now for the United States to arrange a similar union with France and with Germany, and probably other European countries. For the present, Great Britain's hoped for arrangement with

France for penny postage is deferred, but it cannot be postponed for long, and, as has been pointed out, when that comes, other countries must soon be included.

The cordial relations between Great Britian and Japan should make a penny post possible of early attainment and at an inconsiderable cost to each nation.

None can deny after all that has been done in postal progress since 1840 that Universal Penny Postage is no wild dream. That it is coming by degrees and that it will be at no great distance of time completed, must be obvious. On what advances a year, or two years, may make, it would be idle to speculate, but we may look not unreasonably to our Great Powers to prepare the way for the next Postal Union Congress at Madrid, to carry a resolution in favour of Universal Penny Postage.

And after Universal Penny Postage—what then?

The Parcels Post, the Halfpenny Universal Postcard, the Halfpenny Inland Letter, and (in Great Britain) the levelling of the newspaper and magazine rates may be the next matters for the reforming Postmasters-General. But these topics are outside the scope of the present sketch, which was embarked upon to show the inception and development of the idea that a penny was sufficient to defray the cost of transmission of any ordinary letter. And so far as this particular subject is concerned the culmination of a Universal Penny Postage is what we may fairly anticipate, and when missives of personal friendship and relationship, and of business intercourse are being sent broadcast throughout the world for "A Penny all the Way," when business interests are world wide and not local, we may see the realisation of International Peace, and of all the highest and noblest ideals of Burritt's League of Universal Brotherhood.

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